



DYING TO BELONG

(What connection do you think the following illustration has with the Bible texts on the other page?)

Dawn-Marie Wesley was a typical Canadian teenager. She went to school and hung out with a bunch of friends. But, as sometimes happens with a group of friends, things went wrong when another girl heard second-hand that Dawn-Marie was spreading rumors about her.

In November, 2000, Dawn-Marie’s life became miserable. Her former friends ganged up on her. She became a target for school bullies. Other girls even threatened to kill her. Even the few friends who didn’t join in the harassment did nothing to stop it.

Finally, Dawn-Marie couldn’t take it any longer. On November 10, she went home and hanged herself in her room. A younger family member found the body. Dawn-Marie left behind a suicide note in which she said she was killing herself because three girls at school were out to get her. She named the girls, and one was later charged with criminal harassment.

“If I try to get help, it will get worse,” Dawn-Marie wrote. “They are always looking for a new person to beat up and they are the toughest girls.”

Belonging to a group of friends is one of the greatest feelings in the world. Being on the outside of a group is one of the most painful and miserable. Of the many teenagers who decide to end their lives every year, many, like Dawn-Marie, do so because they are bullied, picked on, or left out of a group of friends.

The girl who was convicted of doing the most to bully Dawn-Marie wasn’t sentenced to serve time in a juvenile prison. Because both she and some of Dawn-Marie’s family were aboriginal, they participated in a traditional First Nations’ sentencing circle, which decided she should serve 18-month parole with community service. At the circle, the girl gave Dawn-Marie’s family a letter expressing how sorry she was for what she had done. “Now I watch what I say,” she wrote. “It will have a lasting impact on me for the rest of my life.”

While you may never feel as desperate as Dawn-Marie did, you have probably felt lonely at times. Maybe you’ve found it hard to fit in with a group—or maybe you’ve been the one excluding someone else. How deep is our need for friendship and acceptance? For most of us, it goes straight to the heart.



Key Text: Choose one of the texts from Wednesday’s portion of the lesson. Write it here and memorize it this week.

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Sunday
HERE’S WHAT I THINK

>> This week’s illustration is about a girl who killed herself because her former friends were making her life miserable. The need to have friends who accept and include you is pretty important for teens. How important is it to you? How far would you go—or have you gone—to be accepted by a group? Where do you draw the line? Are there some things you’d never do, even to be accepted by your friends?

>> Log on to www.guidemagazine.org/rtf to post your responses. Be upfront and honest. Say what you think.

Monday
WHAT ARE THEY TRYING TO SAY?

Different people, different opinions. Some of the quotations below represent the views of true kingdom citizens; others may not. Can you tell the difference? How do these statements compare with what God is saying in His Word? After reviewing the texts in the God Says . . . portion of the lesson, write a statement that captures your belief. Be prepared to quote yourself at Sabbath School.

- >> “There are many things which a person can do alone, but being a Christian is not one of them.”—*William T. Ham.*
- >> “In a Christian community, everything depends upon whether each individual is an indispensable link in a chain. Only when even the smallest link is securely interlocked is the chain unbreakable.” —*Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 20th-century German clergyman.*
- >> “Aloneness can lead to loneliness. God’s preventative for loneliness is intimacy—meaningful, open, sharing relationships with one another. In Christ we have the capacity for the fulfilling sense of belonging which comes from intimate fellowship with God and with other believers.”—*Neil T. Anderson, 20th-century U.S. pastor and writer.*
- >> “Dare to love and to be a real friend. The love you give and receive is a reality that will lead you closer and closer to God as well as those whom God has given you to love.”—*Henri Nouwen, 20th-century Dutch theologian and writer.*
- >> “Whether it’s something as little as studying for a biology test or something as big as finding a job over Christmas break, I can’t always fly solo. As humbling as it is to admit, I need the help of other people. I’m discovering this is also true for my Christian life. I need my Christian friends to help me grow in my relationship with God.”—*Christy Simon, current U.S. university student.*
- >> “The only way to have a friend is to be one.”—*Ralph Waldo Emerson, 20th-century U.S. essayist and poet.*

Write your own quotation.
What I say is . . .

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Tuesday
SO WHAT?

- >> Sure, everyone wants to belong. It’s great to have friends that you feel comfortable with. But what do you do if you don’t have that? Maybe you’ve just moved to town or changed schools and you’re finding it hard to get to know people. Maybe your interests, your tastes, or your values make you a little different from most people you know, and it’s hard to find a group that’s “just right” to hang out with.
- >> A lot of times we’re tempted to change ourselves in order to fit in with friends. Sometimes change can be a good thing. For example, you can learn to be more tactful, more thoughtful, more outgoing, all of which will help you get along better with people. You might even take up a new sport or hobby just to make new friends. But what about changing your values? Drinking or smoking because your friends do? Cutting down and criticizing less-popular kids so you can stay part of the popular crowd?
- >> Having friends is great. But not if you have to take apart who you really are and become someone else in order to impress them. Jesus experienced what it is like to be loved by some, but hated by others. He is always a safe Friend to go to for help.

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Thursday
WHAT DOES THIS
HAVE TO DO WITH ME?

- >> We all need friends, but friends come and go. The one friend who will always stick with you is Jesus. His love is unchanging and unconditional.
- >> The best friends to have are friends who will encourage and support you in your walk with Jesus—because they’re walking with Him too! But what if there aren’t many kids your age at church? Or you just don’t get along well with them? Or your “Christian” friends are actually more cliquish and gossipy than your non-Christian friends? (Hey, it happens!)
- >> Pray about it. Talk to your parents, your Sabbath School teacher, any adult who knows you and cares. Yes, you can be friends with a wide variety of different kinds of people—in fact, it’s good for you! But to grow as a Christian, you need to find Christian friends. Maybe you need to reach out to a friend at church you haven’t gotten to know that well. Maybe you can broaden your horizons and include friends who share your beliefs even if they’re a little “different” from you in other ways. God has people for you—people who’ll pray for you and build you up instead of tearing you down as a Christian. Ask Him to help you find them.

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Wednesday
GOD SAYS . . .

- >> **Ecclesiastes 4:9, 10 (CEV)**
“You are better off to have a friend than to be all alone, because then you will get more enjoyment out of what you earn. If you fall, your friend can help you up. But if you fall without having a friend nearby, you are really in trouble.”
- >> **Proverbs 18:24 (Message)**
“Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family.”
- >> **Hebrews 10:24, 25 (CEV)**
“We should keep on encouraging each other to be thoughtful and to do helpful things. Some people have gotten out of the habit of meeting for worship, but we must not do that. We should keep on encouraging each other, especially since you know that the day of the Lord’s coming is getting closer.”
- >> **Proverbs 17:17 (Message)**
“Friends love through all kinds of weather, and families stick together in all kinds of trouble.”
- >> **1 Thessalonians 5:11 (Message)**
“So speak encouraging words to one another. Build up hope so you’ll all be together in this, no one left out, no one left behind. I know you’re already doing this; just keep on doing it.”
- >> **Proverbs 27:17 (CEV)**
“Friends sharpen the minds of each other.”

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Friday
HOW DOES IT WORK?

- >> Think of a friend who has been helpful and encouraging to you. Take a few minutes to write that friend a letter, thanking them for the help and encouragement. Tell your friend you are praying for them. Practice here what you will say in the letter.
